



Cruise passengers' experiences in a Mediterranean port of call. The case study of Valencia



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ABSTRACT

Most cruise tourism studies have been restricted to one geographical region, the Caribbean, to a single cruise line, and to onboard experiences. Despite their relevance there has been little research on the Mediterranean region, on specific ports of call and on off-board experience. Furthermore, in the cruise context, there have been no studies on the role of culture in consumer behavior. Hoping to help fill this void, this research analyzed the influence of cruise passengers' image of a Mediterranean port of call on visit satisfaction and future behavioral intentions, and the moderating role of culture in causal relationships among these constructs. Data were collected in the port of Valencia, one of the main international tourist destinations in Europe, between April and July 2013. The proposed model was assessed by Partial Least Squares technique. Furthermore, individuals with low uncertainty avoidance and a high individualism, composed of British and American cruise passengers, and individuals with high uncertainty avoidance and less individualism, made up of German and Italian cruise passengers, were compared. The results showed that image has a direct influence on satisfaction and satisfaction has a direct effect on future behavioral intention. In addition, influence on future behavioral intention derived from cruise passenger satisfaction differs between the Germans/Italians and the British/Americans. Theoretical and managerial implications and opportunities for future research are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Cruise tourism is the fastest growing tourism subcategory (Papathanassis and Beckmann, 2011; Sun et al., 2011), with an average annual passenger growth rate of 7.6% since 1980 (Cruise Lines International Association, 2011). This subcategory of tourism accounts for approximately 2% of worldwide tourism. This rapid growth of cruise tourism (Brida et al., 2012, 2014) has been due to the incorporation of mega-cruise ships and new ports of call (Douglas and Douglas, 2004). Thus, in 1990 four million people took a cruise, while in 2011 there were 16 million cruise passengers. At this point, the number of worldwide passengers estimated for 2013 is over 21 million (Brida et al., 2012, 2014). In the last decade (2001–2011), passenger capacity of cruises in terms of bed places has grown 82.4% and it is expected to continue growing in the future (Brida et al., 2014).

Despite its relevance, cruise tourism has received very limited attention in research (Papathanassis and Beckmann, 2011; Sun et al., 2011). Moreover, most research studies have focused on a limited geographical region, the Caribbean (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010), due to its popularity. In 2013 the Caribbean accounted for 37.3% of all global itineraries (Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association, 2013). The next most popular choice is the Mediterranean, which accounted for 19.9% of global itineraries in 2013 (Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association, 2013) and 13% in 2009 (Florida-Caribbean Cruise Association, 2009), amounting to a considerable increase in itineraries in this region. Regardless of the importance of this increase, there is a lack of research in this region (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Pranic et al., 2013).

Similarly, most studies on cruising have been focused on a single cruise line (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010) and there are only a few studies on cruising in specific ports of call. Besides, most studies have centered on the characteristics of the Caribbean ports of call (Gabe et al., 2006) while very few of them have analyzed the Mediterranean ones (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Pranic et al., 2013). On the other hand, Xie et al. (2012) point out the need to conduct research on the attributes of off-board activities at ports of call. Pranic et al. (2013) also agree on this matter and

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highlight the fact that all cruise research is focused on onboard experience. They state the need to carry out some studies on cruise passengers' off-board experience and its influence on future behavioral intention.

1.1. Port of call

In the cruise context, a port of call is a place where a cruise ship stops on a travel itinerary and cruise passengers can visit different destinations or ports of call during the cruise (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010; Hwang and Han, 2014). Attractive ports of call that appeal to tourists can increase overall satisfaction with a cruise and can also result in cruise passengers returning or recommending the visit to others.

Ports of call are the main reason for choosing a specific cruise destination (Andriotis and Agiomirgianakis, 2010). Cruise lines select particular ports to provide positive off-board experiences to their customers in the port of call. In the same way, cruise lines can drop a port of call if the customer experience has been unsatisfactory (Henthorne, 2000).

Cruise passenger tourists spend less time at a port of call destination (Larsen et al., 2013), since they tend to stay about 5 or 6 h at the destination they visit (Brida et al., 2012). Other tourists, by contrast, stay for a few days (Larsen et al., 2013). The limited time cruise passengers stay in a port of call and the fact that most cruise passengers spend their time onboard explain why cruise passenger revenues for port of call are lower than that of other tourists (Larsen et al., 2013). However, in the long term cruise passengers can provide additional income if they return or recommend the visit to others.

1.2. Destination image, satisfaction and loyalty

Image is a relevant factor in customer evaluation of a service (Barroso Castro et al., 2007) and plays an important role in subsequent travel behavior. According to Bigné et al. (2009) destination image is the overall image or representation in the tourist's mind of what he/she knows and feels about the destination.

Some authors point out that the image of a destination is formed from images of its attributes (Seaton and Bennett, 1996) while other authors focus on the holistic nature of the image, a global impression that is greater than the sum of its constituent parts (Calantone et al., 1989).

The destination image formed from images of its attributes (the multi-attribute approach) has been the most frequently used (Chi, 2012; Sun et al., 2013). The multi-attribute approach evaluates the destination image through a list of attributes assessed by means of a Likert scale and the overall image as an average or sum of the attribute scores (Sun et al., 2013). There is no consensus about the list of attributes to measure a destination image (Sun et al., 2013). The lack of a conventionally accepted scale leads to the following issue: dimensions that form destination image vary between studies. All the same, as a general rule there are four dimensions that are repeated in most studies: (1) natural and cultural resources; (2) infrastructure and socioeconomic context; (3) social conditions and (4) environment. Their relative importance varies from study to study (Beerli and Martín, 2004a,b; San Martín and Rodríguez, 2008). The first two dimensions, natural and cultural resources, and infrastructure and socioeconomic context, have more functional attributes and are the most representative for having been analyzed in a large number of studies. The other two dimensions, social conditions and the environment, have a greater psychological relevance (Gallarza et al., 2002).

Regarding destination image components, relevant marketing research considers two parts: a cognitive component that includes

functional or tangible elements; and an affective component that covers psychological or intangible elements (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999a,b; Beerli and Martín, 2004a,b; San Martín and Rodríguez, 2008, 2010). The combination of those two interrelated components, cognitive (beliefs) and affective (feelings), provides a tourist's overall image of a destination (Bigné et al., 2009). Most research studies only consider the functional or cognitive component (Echtner and Ritchie, 2003; Lee and Lee, 2009).

In the cruise context, we only find two studies that have analyzed image. Both of them refer to cruise vacation image. The first one is a study by Park (2006), who developed a conceptual model based on destination image literature. The findings were that non-customer current cruising biases and negative images of cruise vacations could be the underlying factors that influence their decisions not to choose cruise vacations over other kinds of vacation. The second study by Hung and Petrick's (2011a) identified a model that integrated two streams of research: destination image and congruity. They referred to the difference between self-congruity (self-images and affective image of destination) and functional congruity (perfect images of cruising attributes and cognitive images of cruising) to explain travel intentions. Proposed hypotheses were supported.

Previous studies, in the tourist context, show an important link between destination image and satisfaction (Bigné et al., 2009). Satisfaction is present in most studies as a consequence of image (Barroso Castro et al., 2007; Sun et al., 2013) and there is a direct positive relationship between both variables. In the cruise context, not a single study has analyzed the relationship between image and satisfaction. Therefore we posit that:

H1. Port of call destination image positively influences cruise passengers' satisfaction with the port of call destination.

Satisfaction, in turn, is an antecedent of loyalty (Prayag and Ryan, 2012). It is likely that satisfied tourists return to destinations and that they also share their experiences with their friends and relatives (Chen and Tsai, 2007). Regarding ports of call, only the study of Pranic et al. (2013) based on a micro-cruise, verifies and confirms these relationships. Due to the lack of studies in this area, we will verify the relationship between cruise passengers' satisfaction and their intention of returning and/or recommending the visit to the port of Valencia to friends and relatives. The hypothesis will be:

H2. A cruise passenger's satisfaction with a port of call destination positively influences his/her port of call destination loyalty.

Another antecedent of loyalty is destination image (Barroso Castro et al., 2007) and we chose this antecedent because it was a suggested area of research (Xie et al., 2012). In the literature, there is evidence to support a causal relationship between image and loyalty (Barroso Castro et al., 2007). In the cruise context, for cruise lines, Hung and Petrick (2011a) confirm a relationship between image and loyalty. However, no study has applied this relationship to ports of call. The hypothesis is:

H3. Port of call destination image positively influences port of call destination loyalty.

1.3. Culture

Culture is a relevant factor in the field of tourism and a growing number of papers have incorporated this variable (Forgas-Coll et al.,

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